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SUMMARY

AN ANALYSIS OF VANDALISM IN HAMILTON-WENTWORTH

INTERIN REPORT

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON VANDALISM

JUNE, 1978

THE SOCIAL PLANNING and RESEARCH COUNCIL of Hamilton and District

153½ KING STREET EAST HAMILTON, ONTARIO TELEPHONE 522-1148

POINT OF REFERENCE

The information contained in this report is based on a subjective analysis of the nature of vandalism. While presenting a profile of this serious community concern, this report does not deal with resolving the problem. This interim presentation is meant to act as a catalyst from which the community can respond and become actively involved in finding resolutions.

The Committee on Vandalism wishes to extend its thanks to the Hamilton-Wentworth Regional Police Department and Acting Sergent T. Sullivan in particular, for their assistance in providing statistical information for this Interim Report.

MEMBERSHIP

Committee on Vandalism
of the
Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton and District

CHAIRMAN

MITCHELL, Mr. Stephen
Associate Director, Community Services Unit
The Greater Hamilton Y.M.C.A.

BELL, Ms. Sandi,
Trustee,
Board of Education for the City of Hamilton.

FRASER, Mr. Craig,
Board of Directors,
The Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton and District.

GALLAGHER, Miss Margaret-Ann,
Children's Aid Society of Hamilton-Wentworth.

HAMMOND, Mr. Ted,
Program Director,
Sir Wilfrid Laurier Recreation Centre.

HOBBS, Mr. Jim,
Co-ordinator of Community and Volunteer Services.

MacMILLAN, Miss Micki / McGOFF, Mr. John,
Juvenile Probation and After-Care,
Ministry of Community and Social Services, Children's Services Division.

McMEEKIN, Mr. Ted,
Alderman,
City of Hamilton.

SIMPSON, Mr. Jerry,
Committee on Developing Adolescents.

SULLIVAN, Acting-Sergent Terry,
Crime Prevention Section,
Hamilton-Wentworth Regional Police.

TREBILCOCK, Mr. Fred,
Director,
Astra Society of Hamilton and District.

STAFF

BERMAN, Mrs. Donna M.
Planning Associate
The Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton and District

PURPOSE OF THE COMMITTEE ON VANDALISM

The purpose for the committee was to include the examination of the problems and factors influencing the incidence of vandalism in the Regional Municipality of Hamilton-Wentworth. After an examination of the problems of vandalism, the exploration of various alternatives to deal with this serious social problem will be documented by the committee.

HISTORY OF THE COMMITTEE ON VANDALISM

Since May, 1977 the committee has collected a substantial number of books and articles written on the topic of vandalism. An annotated bibliography is included with the full report.

Members of the committee travelled to other communities to collect information on efforts and programs being conducted to deal with the problem of vandalism.

With the assistance of the Hamilton-Wentworth Regional Police Department a statistical survey of reported incidents of vandalism during a twelve-month period was conducted.

The committee agreed to co-sponsor a Canada Works porject (P.I.L.O.T.) which has developed community-based programs for youth, in two areas of the city.

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DEFINITION OF VANDALISM

After a great deal of thought and discussion the Committee on Vandalism adopted the following definition of vandalism which was developed by the Mississauga Task Force on Vandalism (June, 1976):

> The wilful or malicious destruction, injury, disfigurement or defacement of any public or private property real or personal, without the consent of the owner or person having control of the property in question.

The Committee on Vandalism, while adopting the Mississauga Task Force definition, also defines vandalism as a community-based problem.

COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT VANDALISM

1. Vandalism Is A Youth-Related Crime. (?)

   ACCORDING TO THE POLICE STUDY A MAJORITY (64%) OF THE APPREHENDED VANDALS WERE AGE 16 AND OVER. NINETEEN PERCENT (19%) OF VANDALS WERE AGED 22 AND OVER.

2. Vandalism Is A Lower Class Crime. (?)

   PARTICIPATION IN ACTS OF VANDALISM CROSSES ALL SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUNDS AND HAS NOT PROVEN TO BE LIMITED TO ONE SOCIO-ECONOMIC GROUP.

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SOME MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT VANDALISM

1. Vandalism is a Youth-Related Crime. (?)

ACCORDING TO THE POLICE STUDY, A MAJORITY (?%) OF THE APPREHENDED VANDALS WERE AGE 18 AND OVER. WHERE REPORTED (?%) OF VANDALS WERE AGED 22 AND OVER.

2. Vandalism is A Lower Class Crime. (?)

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3. Vandalism Is A Group Activity. (?)

IN THE 25% OF THE TOTAL INCIDENTS IN WHICH SUSPECTS WERE SEEN THE POLICE STATISTICS INDICATE THAT 59% APPEARED TO INVOLVE ONLY ONE PERSON.

4. Vandalism Is A "No Reason Crime". (?)

BASED ON THE WORK OF THE COMMITTEE IT HAS BEEN CONCLUDED THAT THERE ARE NUMEROUS CAUSAL FACTORS RELATED TO ACTS OF VANDALISM.

5. Vandalism Is Alcohol and Drug Related. (?)

ONLY 2% OF THE APPREHENDED VANDALS WERE JUDGED TO BE UNDER THE EFFECTS OF MOOD-ALTERING SUBSTANCES. HOWEVER, OFFICERS ARE NOT REQUIRED TO INDICATE THE CONDITION OF THE SUBJECT IN THEIR REPORT AND MANY, THEREFORE, DO NOT.

CAUSES OF VANDALISM

The committee not only utilized written articles and books as a reference from which to articulate causes of vandalism but also obtained the opinions of various professionals who work in the Hamilton-Wentworth community. Statements on causes of vandalism were obtained from Mrs. Mary Blum, Director of the Child and Adolescent Services; from Judge David Steinberg and Judge John Van Duzer who preside in the Unified Family Court; and from a report written by Mr. E. A. Hutton, Director of Education for the Board of Education for the City of Hamilton.

CAUSES OF VANDALISM

Causes of vandalism can be directly associated with a lack of responsibility by the individual to the community and a lack of responsibility by the community to the individual.

Realizing this is a very broad statement the Committee on Vandalism wishes to further delineate this statement through the following points. It must be noted that the following points do not represent an exhaustive approach, but rather represent the primary causes as identified by this committee. No particular order or ranking have been assigned to the following points.

ANGER AND FRUSTRATION:

- Growing anonymity in urban society.
- Failure to meet expectations - i.e., personal, societal, professional, educational, peer group.
- Drug and alcohol related incidents.

GENERAL ACCEPTANCE AS A WAY OF LIFE:

- Intimidation (fear of retaliation).
- Lack of consequences to both the victim and the vandal due to an attitude that "insurance companies, or government, will take care of it".
- Lack of visible consequences to both the victim and the vandal within the judicial process.
- Peer group acceptance and status.

GROUP PRESSURE:

- Group mores - i.e., football games, conventions, social activities.
- Lack of direction in using one's leisure time constructively or creatively.

LESSENING OF PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITY:

- Lack of instilled responsibility and respect for other's property.
- Lack of parenting skills.
- Change in parental role.
- Family disorganized due to situation.

LACK OF VALUE FOR PROPERTY OF OTHERS:

- Lack of personal conscience.
- An attitude of "so long as it is not mine, I am not terribly concerned."
- An attitude that "someone else (insurance companies) will take care of it".
- Lack of instilled responsibility/respect.

DAMAGE BY INTENT:

- Social protest
- Racism
- Retaliation

TOWN PLANNING:

- i.e., high density, depersonalized neighbourhoods.

NEXT STEPS FOR THE COMMITTEE ON VANDALISM

In recognition of the fact that this report represents the completion of the research phase the Committee on Vandalism is proposing several next steps which exemplify the direction in which the committee is heading.

The Committee on Vandalism is providing a general statement as the members view their role as one of facilitation not problem-solving. With this in mind the committee has adopted the following action steps:

1. Develop public education programs based on the work of the committee, to date, The committee perceives three main components in this step:

   (a) gather and/or design materials for public distribution;

   (b) present the work of the committee to the public through the media and public presentations;

   (c) seek out, encourage and assist existing and emerging groups to deal with the vandalism problem in their community.

2. Select appropriate target groups fro whom programs could be designed based on the findings contained in the police study.

3. Examine existing programs, committees, and projects dealing with the problem of vandalism placing a priority on local programs (those in existence in the Regional Municipality of Hamilton-Wentworth).

4. Re-evaluate committee membership based on the tasks at hand and to expand membership as deemed appropriate.

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Any individuals wishing information may contact the Chairman, Mr. Stephen Mitchell at 383-2139 or Donna Berman at 522-1148.

DMB:gmm

URBAN/MUN